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SUBJECT: IRAQI RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN JORDAN FACE SIMILAR
DIFFICULTIES AS FELLOW IRAQIS; MOST UNLIKELY TO RETURN HOME
ANYTIME SOON

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Iraqis residing in Jordan representing the Chaldean, Assyrian, Sabeen, and Yezidi communities claim to be targets of discrimination and attacks in Iraq and do not envision ever being able to return safely to Iraq. They report financial and personal difficulties while residing in Jordan, usually illegally, but no particular harassment or fears of physical harm. End summary.

Complaints about UNHCR But Few Details

¶2. (SBU) Beginning in November 2007, as part of an ongoing strategic outreach effort, Embosffs have met with approximately 400 Iraqi Christians and their leaders currently residing in Jordan, in order to learn more about the experiences in Iraq that drove them to leave, as well as their current living conditions in Jordan. Iraqi Christians were often eager to meet with Embassy officials whom they perceived as well-positioned to facilitate their interactions with UNHCR and increase the likelihood of resettlement.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador and EmbOffs met several times over the last six months with Chaldean priest Fr. Raymond al-Moussali and over 60 Iraqi members of his parish, nearly all of whom were registered as &asylum seekers8 with UNHCR. Moussali reported that his parish includes over 10,000 Iraqi refugees, and he holds four different services each week in Amman and outlying areas. Most of the Iraqi parishioners were well-informed of UNHCR/IOM resettlement procedures. Many, however, shared assertions of mistreatment or bias at the hands of UNHCR officials. When asked for further detail, few could substantiate their claims. Nevertheless, Embosffs relayed concerns to UNHCR offices in each case, which promised to investigate any such allegations. UNHCR reported plans to conduct a separate community outreach program that would include religious groups, and has since confirmed that its first session took place in mid-June. UNHCR Resident Representative Imran Riza noted that UNHCR understood the need to reach out to religious minority communities, but wanted to avoid accusations of bias that could arise from singling out specific groups for special treatment or attention.

Reports of Targeted Attacks on Christians in Iraq

¶4. (SBU) All the Iraqi Christians met reportedly departed Iraq after being specifically targeted for threats of physical violence against themselves and family members. Stories of oppression in Iraq ranged from merely verbal or written (telephone threats or notes posted to their doors at night), to severe (actual kidnappings and/or murder of family members), to the extreme (stories often passed third or fourth-hand of alleged horrific acts by extremists or

militias, such as cannibalism of kidnapped victims). Many described specific instances of harassment based on religious beliefs. Sabeans-Mandeans noted that they often ran gold and jewelry shops that were targeted by insurgents who viewed them as easy targets with no defense. Sabeans explained to EmbOffs that insurgents looted their stores, telling their victims to convert or be killed. Some Iraqi Christians who ran distilleries or sold alcohol in Iraq faced similar discriminations by religious zealots who targeted them for activities deemed to be un-Islamic.

Life in Jordan) Better, But Still Difficult

15. (SBU) Complaints by Iraqi Christians have been similar to those expressed by the broader population of Iraqis in Jordan) increasing poverty, the lack of permanent status, the inability to legally work, the fear of discovery and deportation by authorities, and general distrust of government officials. The Sabeans-Mandeans, additionally, described isolated instances of misunderstandings or mistreatment by Muslims, although none complained of outward harassment or fear of physical danger while they have resided in Jordan.

No Return to Iraq Envisioned

16. (SBU) EmbOffs have not yet encountered anyone among these Iraqi religious minorities who say they envision returning home to Iraq during their lifetimes. All looked westward for their future, hoping for resettlement in the U.S. or a third

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country, where many reported already having family members.

17. (SBU) Comment: Iraqi religious minority residents, concerns are generally similar to the concerns expressed by the broader population of Iraqis in Jordan) poverty, inability to work, and the fear of discovery and deportation by authorities. In addition, Iraqi Christians show themselves just as susceptible as the broader refugee population to the vagaries of 3rd- or 4th-hand rumors and news affecting their lives, whether regarding the situation on the ground in Iraq or perceptions of Jordanian government or UN attitudes. Regardless of the genuine efforts and real progress made in many of these areas, and the need for further progress, engagement with this population will have to continue to directly address the combination of misinformation and legitimate fear that pervades the refugee community and will surely affect decisions regarding whether to return home to Iraq or remain in Jordan.

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